

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Viet Cong Infrastructure:
Its Status and Effectiveness

Summary

The most critical struggles in South Vietnam during the past two years have been those waged daily at the grass roots levels. The Communists have not been trying to drive the government's military and security forces from the field, nor have their tactics been aimed at altering the balance of forces in the countryside in the near term. Instead, the enemy has been trying to hold on, to stay in contact with the people, and to rebuild local support structures and forces. The main Communist objective has been to keep an apparatus intact and ready to mount a more serious challenge to the GVN after the bulk of US forces has been withdrawn.

The Communists have accomplished much less with these tactics than they hoped. Until now trends have continued to run against them in most parts of the country and they still seem to be losing more capable cadre than are being replaced.

The process is too slow, however, to disable the most vital parts of the Communist apparatus in the next few years. Thus, for the foreseeable future there will be Communist cadre with dedication, administrative know-how, and command experience operating throughout South Vietnam.

What these hard-core cadre can do now is severely limited by the massive allied forces arrayed against them. But allied abilities to contain enemy activities and to maintain the security that has been established depend heavily on continued aggressive government operations. If these operations falter, or if they are offset by rising enemy activity, the Communists will be able to rebuild faster.

The withdrawal of American forces and the likelihood that more North Vietnamese manpower will be committed to the war suggest that the threat to the GVN will grow during the next year or so. The withdrawal of US forces from parts of MRs 1 and 2 has already created hard-to-fill gaps in allied security and allowed the Communists to operate more freely. It is too early and the evidence is too sketchy to conclude that the Communists are on the road to recovery in these two regions. But if North Vietnam pumps in more manpower and military units during the next year or so--as seems likely--Saigon will

be hard pressed to maintain the degree of control it now has over the people and the Communist apparatus is likely to enter a period of resurgence.

Government gains probably are more durable in the Mekong Delta and in MR-3, but even in these regions the Communists retain considerable strength in some areas. If enemy main force units return from Cambodia or if there is a marked decline in the effectiveness and aggressiveness of government forces--as has happened in some places--the Communists will become more active and security will deteriorate. Moreover, if there should be a severe loss of confidence in the government, perhaps caused by fear of a precipitous end to US support or by a falling out among South Vietnam's top military commanders, there will be a Communist apparatus available with the talent and organization to exploit both political and military opportunities.

1. The erosion of Communist strength and the decline in the effectiveness of the Viet Cong's grass roots apparatus have been basic trends in much of South Vietnam during the past three years. Communist forces are simply not able to muster the kind of manpower and material resources from the countryside that they could in earlier years. Yet a countrywide enemy apparatus is intact--if not always in place--and with continued material and manpower support from North Vietnam, the Communists remain strong contenders for power. Indeed, over the past six months or so, the evidence suggests that the Communists are having some success in improving the effectiveness of their apparatus. This stems in part from the inability of the South Vietnamese in some areas to maintain effective security as US forces depart. Without US forces near by, the Communists are often able to take advantage of persistent GVN weaknesses.

2. This memorandum attempts to assess recent trends in the portion of the Communist apparatus in South Vietnam known as the Viet Cong infrastructure (VCI). The views expressed here are largely impressionistic; they are derived primarily from immersion in the reporting from South Vietnam and not from any of the data series used to measure the progress

of allied programs. Allied strength figures for the VCI are so soft and the criteria for them so fluid that any conclusions based mainly on numbers are apt to be misleading. Thus, the memorandum does not concentrate on the numerical strength of the VCI, but on the current effectiveness of the apparatus and its potential ability to influence the situation.

The Conceptual Framework: What's a VCI?

3. All methods for taking the measure of the Vietnamese Communists are imperfect, and sizing up the so-called Viet Cong infrastructure is especially difficult. The term itself is a problem. The Communists do not use it to describe any part of their bureaucracy. Infrastructure is an American term for the command and control organization that provides guidance, sustenance, and certain specialized services to the overall Communist effort in South Vietnam. Members of the apparatus often perform military duties, and some of their main jobs--terrorism, extortion, and armed propaganda--depend heavily on the use or threat of violence.

4. But the primary mission of the VCI is not combat or even direct combat support. Most people we consider members of the VCI earn this distinction because they engage in activities that constitute

essential underpinning for all Communist operations in South Vietnam. They provide political and military direction, they administer, they recruit, they conduct subversive and intelligence operations, and they collect funds and supplies. They are the Communist party members, political activists, agitators, and organizers whose talents and motivation have enabled the Communists to persist for so many years. When these people do their jobs well, the Communists are able to fight more effectively in South Vietnam. But when the support structure has been weakened and the VCI is ineffective, as it often has been in recent years, the enemy's capabilities are much more dependent on men and material from North Vietnam.

5. Except in those few areas of South Vietnam where the Communists maintain physical control, the apparatus generally operates clandestinely. But it usually can be identified by function, if not by personality, because of the highly structured bureaucracy the Viet Cong have built and maintain.

6. Even a short time spent perusing enemy documents can convey a strong notion of the pervasiveness of the Communist organization. It extends downward through six basic echelons--COSVN, region province, district, village, and hamlet. At each

level (at least in theory) there is a steering committee and organizations responsible for such varied tasks as finance, public health, propaganda, security, and manpower recruitment. At the district levels and above, committees and agencies are organized quite rigidly and they usually are manned by full-time personnel. In the villages and hamlets, the organization is loose, more often staffed by part-timers, and usually does not include all components. In fact, local Communist functionaries in today's South Vietnam often are unable to reside in or even enter the areas of their nominal jurisdiction.

Why the Numbers Are Misleading

7. The allied Phoenix/Phung Hoang program aimed at rooting out the VCI defines its target to include all members or probationary members of the Vietnamese Communist party and those nonparty people who perform a "cadre function." The concept focuses on leadership or key personnel, but in practice almost anyone who is identified working regularly and voluntarily for the party or a front group at any echelon can be picked up in statistics used by the Phung Hoang organization.

8. The current Phung Hoang estimate of the size of the Viet Cong infrastructure throughout

South Vietnam is around 68,000. This is an unrealistic portrayal of the extent of the organized Communist apparatus because it excludes so many low-level and part-time people who work for the Communists. Moreover, it does not take account of enough clandestine Communist personnel assets, including penetrations of South Vietnamese government, military, and security agencies, or those who have legal cover and can live safely and work covertly under the eye of South Vietnamese security authorities. Most persons in these categories are not likely to be included in allied estimates of the VCI.

9. But while Phung Hoang estimates may be too conservative in some respects, they also suffer from double counting and unrealistic extrapolations based on Communist organization charts. Moreover, just as some South Vietnamese officials minimize the strength of the VCI, others tend to exaggerate the number of hard-core cadre they face.

10. Showing numerical trends in VCI strength from year to year is even more hazardous than pinning down the size of the apparatus at any one time. Estimates range upwards from 80,000 for the mid-1960's through the first half of 1969; they were over 70,000 in early 1970; and they were just under

70,000 during the past year. Yet definitions and accounting procedures have changed so frequently in the past six years that these statistics are not comparable and do not adequately reflect trends.

11. Similarly, Phung Hoang estimates of VCI members killed, captured, or defected cannot be directly related to the total VCI strength estimates. Nearly 20,000 VCI were reported neutralized in these ways in 1969, over 20,000 in 1970, and the rate reported this year is even higher. These figures include people improperly identified, defectors who still work for the Communists, and individuals who are subsequently released and return to enemy ranks. Furthermore, many key persons in the Communist command set-up obviously die or desert without ever being included in the neutralization data.

12. Thus, while Phung Hoang statistics are a necessary tool for those concerned with the allied countersubversion effort in South Vietnam, they are inadequate for analyzing trends in Viet Cong capabilities. Individual provinces figures help measure the extent of the enemy's cadre and support structure, and the numbers often parallel conclusions reached in more subjective ways. But sharp fluctuations in some provinces from time to time

indicate that the margin for local error is quite large--so large, in fact, as to undercut almost any national projections.

Trends in VCI Performance and Policies

13. Whatever its numerical strength, the Communist apparatus clearly was hurt badly during the three years following the 1968 offensives. Indeed, its effectiveness probably has been curtailed in some parts of South Vietnam even more than is suggested by trends in Phung Hoang statistics. Communist documents, prisoners, and defectors provide persuasive evidence for this conclusion. These sources show convincingly that in most parts of the country the capabilities of the apparatus have been eroded, even in areas that remain Communist strongholds and where the government's position is at best precarious.

14. The loss of cadre has been heaviest at the lower levels, of course, but district and even province organizations have felt the pressures caused by losing good chiefs and long-time followers. Key people who know their jobs and know the territory simply cannot be replaced as readily as before. Heavy personnel losses and the increasing difficulty of recruiting the best young men of the villages make it harder to fill vacancies simply

by promotions. Any good cadre who is promoted is likely to leave another hard-to-fill vacancy and thus reduce the quality of the apparatus down the line.

15. Many Communist political and administrative leaders lost their lives during the 1968 offensives, and many others have died in the day-to-day combat since 1968. With large numbers of small actions the order of the day on both sides, local-level cadre often find themselves exposed to battle. Military action remains the biggest factor in the erosion of the Viet Cong's apparatus. A fair number of cadre at the village and hamlet levels get killed or captured while on military operations, but very few provincial or even district officials regularly run the risks involved in military assignments. These higher level people are the prime targets of the Phung Hoang anti-infrastructure effort; capturing or killing them generally requires better intelligence and police work than is the rule in South Vietnam today.

16. Because the Communists put a premium on preserving key personnel to carry on the struggle, many provincial and district committees set up housekeeping in base areas or keep on the move from safehaven to safehaven. Provincial level

cadre, in particular, generally stay permanently beyond the reach of government forces targeted against them. At district level and below, individuals and committees are more likely to move about in order to facilitate contact with their various subordinates and to avoid being detected. Where government presence is massive and where local government leadership is aggressive, the Communists often are obliged to keep their committees moving quite regularly. This makes communications between individuals and agencies more difficult and reduces operational effectiveness.

17. At the village level, the government's manifold operations have inflicted real and serious damage on the Communist structure in many areas by separating it from the people. Cadre at this level must be present to provide leadership and motivation, and to inspire fear or respect in order to obtain local support. If they are not in place, they must rely on less vulnerable--and probably less effective--agents to do some of their jobs for them. Cadre working in the village and hamlet organizations must spot the government official targeted for assassination, mark his movement, and plan and supervise the murder. It is at the village level and in the hamlets that taxes must actually

be collected, that people must be organized, propagandized, and proselyted, and that new personnel must be recruited. As long as the Communists try to build up their support among the people and to draw sustenance from them, they must operate among the people. No matter how good their clandestine techniques and their skills at subversion, their type of war cannot be fought by correspondence.

18. The Viet Cong face a bleak situation in some parts of South Vietnam today, but in most of the country they retain at least a foothold amongst the people and in some key areas their strength and influence rivals or even outweighs the government's. Soon after trends in the fighting and the government's pacification effort began to move strongly against them in late 1968 and early 1969, the Communists took steps to stem the tide and to conserve their strength as much as possible for the long road they saw ahead. Their general counter-strategy was aimed at preserving those parts of their apparatus that would be hardest to replace--including hard-core cadre of the VCI--maintaining contact with the people as much as possible, and at the same time nibbling away at the government's pacification assets.

19. In mid-1969, after trying one more coor-

dinated offensive involving many main force combat units, the Communists began to scale down their military efforts, to stress small-unit action and the need for guerrilla forces, and to rely heavily on hit-and-run attacks and terrorism. These measures were accompanied by a sharp cutback in the southward flow of North Vietnamese manpower and the breaking down of some regiments and battalions in order to strengthen local forces. Many Communist documents and press articles stressed the fundamentals of a "people's war" in which secure base areas, sound organization, and healthy working relationships with the local populace are paramount.

20. For the Viet Cong apparatus in South Vietnam, the watchwords became subversion, terrorism, self-sufficiency, and political agitation. Many cadre formerly engaged in other tasks were assigned to a special military proselyting campaign aimed at subverting South Vietnamese forces and infiltrating their ranks with the Communist agents. Similarly, the Communists began to stress the need to develop so-called legal cadre--party members or party agents with the status and credentials to survive and to operate clandestinely in the growing areas under at least nominal GVN control.

21. The loss of their supply channel through

Sihanoukville, the political turnabout in Cambodia, and subsequent allied cross-border operations prompted the Communists in the southern half of South Vietnam to redouble efforts to achieve the greatest possible level of self-sufficiency. The local apparatus was enjoined to grow food, to engage in commercial ventures, to conserve and to capture weapons and ammunition, and to work out ways to secure supplies from South Vietnamese sources.

22. In recent months the Communists have put more energy into developing assets in urban areas in the hope of infiltrating and influencing non-Communist opposition elements agitating against the government. They certainly do not call all the shots in these circles, and their attempts to inspire more agitation frequently are feckless, but they clearly see opportunities to fan fires prompted by war weariness, economic grievances, and anti-American sentiment. These efforts probably will grow during the next few months, if only because the Communists wish to avoid being left on the sidelines during the political ferment of an election year.

23. The tactics Hanoi adopted in 1969 were not intended to produce trends favorable to the

Communists immediately. They were aimed at heading off still heavier manpower losses, maintaining the integrity of the countryside apparatus, and putting the Communists in a strong position for the struggle they expect to ensue following the departure of US combat forces.

24. Two years of these tactics have had very mixed results. Hanoi probably is chagrined at the extent to which South Vietnamese forces have taken over security duties, kept pressure on the Communists, and restricted their abilities to operate. Similarly, the loss of supply and sanctuary arrangements in Cambodia have undercut the enemy military threat to much of South Vietnam and thus reduced the effectiveness of the course Hanoi chose in 1969. Communist manpower losses have remained fairly high, and a substantial flow of North Vietnamese troops has not halted the decline in enemy force levels nor made up for the loss of capable southern cadre.

25. The results of Communist subversive efforts are far more difficult to measure because successful subversion usually goes undetected. Enemy troop proselyters clearly have had some success; roughly one third of some 70 South Vietnamese outposts overrun in the delta so far this year fell

because of Communist agents in the ranks of local security forces. Many more enemy assets doubtless are at work within the far-flung South Vietnamese government and security apparatus. Because of the time, energy, and talent going into the enemy subversive effort, it is only prudent to assume some measure of success. Yet it is equally clear that in the kind of hostile environment they encounter in much of South Vietnam today, Communist subversive operations are often likely to fall flat.

26. The extent to which the Communists have successfully outfitted their apparatus with legal cover is equally difficult to judge. The "legal cadre" theme has been so prominent in enemy tactical directives that, given the quality of most South Vietnamese countersubversive efforts, there is every reason to believe that thousands of Communists have successfully survived and now operate under such cover. But there are problems inherent in these so-called legal activities. Communist sources acknowledge that keeping a tight party rein on "legal" personnel assets frequently is difficult and that a taste of a softer life and urban amenities dilutes the revolutionary zeal of even hardcore party members. Moreover, it is one thing to send a man from the jungles to take cover in a city

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and quite another to recruit new assets who already have legal cover.

27. The evidence suggests the Viet Cong recruiter has a much more difficult time making his pitch effective today than he did a few years ago. That he can usually make it and not get turned in to government authorities may contribute to Communist confidence about the longer term prospects. But while people's willingness to tolerate Communists in their midst enables the Viet Cong apparatus to survive, the enemy needs cooperation and active support to make many operations work.

28. Communist self-sufficiency programs have had considerable success in South Vietnam because they thrive on the apathy and venality of many government officials. The reporting from South Vietnam is rife with examples of successful self-sufficiency operations. Through bribes, intimidation, and the connivance of a few people in key spots, the Communists often are able to tap legitimate GVN sources to secure the goods and services they need to survive. In most of the country they are a long way from achieving the kind of self-sustaining insurgency they enjoyed in earlier years, but they do seem to have the means to enable them to keep waging an inconclusive but still viable

struggle.

29. So far we have tried to generalize about the state of the Viet Cong apparatus in South Vietnam. Our conclusions generally have shown the Communists losing ground and the government gradually making headway in the countryside. But there is no single "situation" in South Vietnam; the state of the enemy apparatus is different in each of the four military regions, and the variations are even more pronounced as one looks at individual provinces. The following sections examine the current condition and activities of the VCI in each of the four military regions. Unlike the general comments, these sections focus on recent trends and on problem areas where the Communists remain strong and where enemy activities are likely to be most troublesome in the future.

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Military Region 1: An Uncertain Future

30. Overall trends in local Communist activity in Military Region 1 were clearly favorable to the government until a few months ago. The main force war subsided after mid-1969, and this allowed allied forces to contain and in some places to root out an entrenched and pervasive Viet Cong apparatus. South Vietnamese forces and strong, active American ground units saturated the 20-mile wide coastal strip straddling Route 1 where most of the people in the region live. The Viet Cong were simply ground down by allied operations, and they were held down by a thick blanket of territorial security forces.

31. Under these conditions the Communist apparatus concentrated on survival, on rebuilding its strength, and on avoiding allied forces as best it could. The VCI in much of the coastal strip found the going too tough and took flight into the hills. Allied gains were by no means uniform or complete. They were greatest in the two northern provinces where the enemy apparatus is less firmly rooted and no longer very effective. The three southern provinces still contain some of the most formidable concentrations of Viet Cong strength in the country, and progress there is more limited and less durable.

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33. By late 1970 government pacification forces had reached out about as far as they could in some places in MR-1; ahead lay the foothills and longtime VC strongholds that contained few people but that could be overcome only with great difficulty. In other areas, allied gains rested largely on American ground combat forces, and US troops were pulling out. In still other places, Viet Cong resistance stiffened and the GVN lost some of its former momentum.

33. The allies retain the upper hand in MR-1, but the Viet Cong are a long way from being rendered ineffective. Moreover, the departure of more US units and the possibility of North Vietnam pumping in more forces during the coming months make for a very uncertain future. There already are signs that the local Communist apparatus has more room to maneuver. More important, the Viet Cong retain deep-seated support that has enabled them to persist under the strongest challenge the allies could mount against them. In all probability, the Communists anticipate the going will be less difficult from now on because the US combat role is ending.

34. Northernmost Quang Tri Province is, of course, constantly exposed to the threat of North Vietnamese military power. In the past two years there has been steady progress against the local Viet Cong

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apparatus, in part because enemy main forces have been kept at bay. Viet Cong activities were stifled by saturation operations run against them in the coastal areas. Late last year government officials claimed with good reason that the Viet Cong apparatus no longer functioned effectively in Quang Tri City and most of the coastal districts. Viet Cong hamlet and village committees were said to have fled entirely from three districts into the hills to the west. The province committee remained in the foothills where it has been for years.

35. Trends during the first part of this year have been less encouraging. Many ARVN units and some US forces that provided security to Quang Tri were committed to Operation LAM SON 719 from late January through late March. This caused redeployment and thinning out of the blanket of territorial security forces at a time when Viet Cong activities were on the rise. There was a marked increase in overt Viet Cong activities--terrorism, tax collection, food gathering, and hamlet entries. American officers say the Communists appeared populated areas in greater numbers and with greater frequency than in many months.

36. The enemy upsurge in Quang Tri did not last, but it suggests that many localities still harbor

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Communist cadre and that the apparatus is capable of rebounding if the South Vietnamese fail to keep the pressure on. The province chief estimates that around a third of the people would cast their lot with the Viet Cong if given a free choice and that the rest of the population now supports the GVN. This may be only a rough guess, but so much residual support for the Communists could be critical if security deteriorates; the province chief expects it will because US forces are withdrawing.

37. The VCI in Thua Thien Province has been hurt badly since 1968. Aggressive allied operations forced Communist military units back into the foothills, dislodged parts of the local apparatus, and drove the rest of it deeper underground. Bitterness over Communist activities in the Hue area during the 1968 Tet offensive contributed substantially to the enemy's decline.

38. Last year the Communists had trouble just surviving in many areas along the coast. Some main force units apparently were split up to help local Viet Cong forces rebuild their apparatus. The VCI was so depleted in three districts that the Communists

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had to borrow people from neighboring districts to launch a terrorist campaign in the lowlands. Contact between the Viet Cong along the coast and Communist forces in central and western Thua Thien was sorely disrupted. Communist cadre who stayed in government controlled territory had to hide or attempt to go "legal." South Vietnamese officials say they were unable to develop solid information on the VCI during the last quarter of 1970; their security services had no information on the VC province committee and knew little about recent activities of district committees. With the exception of periodic sabotage against the Hue-Da Nang railroad--an easy and inviting target--the Viet Cong in Thua Thien seemed to do little more than protect and consolidate what assets they retained.

39. ARVN and US redeployments connected with LAM SON 719 weakened security markedly in Thua Thien and the Communists reacted accordingly. When Regional Force units were moved west to the security screen in the piedmonts, territorial forces back in the lowlands faced a sharp increase in Viet Cong activity. Enemy-initiated incidents in the lowlands were up 70 percent in March over February; terrorism was at its highest level in two years. Abductions,

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propaganda and food collection efforts went up too, especially after local enemy forces were told they could expect little outside help because of the need to counter the South Vietnamese drive into Laos.

40. The upsurge in Viet Cong activity has not lasted and did not in itself threaten Thua Thien's standing among the most secure provinces in South Vietnam. As in Quang Tri, the future in Thua Thien will turn on how well the South Vietnamese can adjust to US troop withdrawals and keep the pressure on the Communists. Saigon's forces are likely to have their hands full if the North Vietnamese decide to bring more military units back to Thua Thien in the next year or so.

41. US ground combat forces have been essential to keeping the Communists in check in Quang Nam Province. Since they arrived there in 1965, American units--helped out to some extent by ARVN and South Korean regulars--gradually beat down the Viet Cong apparatus along the coast and generally kept the lid on enemy main forces. The VCI failed to hold its own in some places, but a basic organization remained intact, if not always in place.

42. GVN territorial forces and the civilian apparatus targeted against the VCI have been and still are overmatched. This judgment is based on rather consistent assessments by Vietnamese and

American officials in Quang Nam, and to a lesser extent on what has happened in sectors recently vacated by American units. The Communists have reasserted themselves quickly and convincingly. One is reminded of a large ship parting the sea as it passes through and the water closing rapidly when the ship is gone.

43. The catalog of problems facing the Viet Cong while the American presence was overwhelming is a familiar one: shortages of seasoned cadres, shortages of foodstuffs and materials, difficulties maintaining contact, and just plain too little elbow room to operate. Several sources say Communist influence at the hamlet level waned and that village committees were not much better off. These grassroots echelons were said to be floundering because of lack of direction and supplies from above, because of population movement out of areas formerly controlled by the Viet Cong, and because of constant disruptive allied military operations.

44. Nonetheless, the Communists have retained some basic strengths in Quang Nam that enable them to hang on. The higher echelon-VCI apparatus has hardly been touched. The VC province committee is still situated in the hills southwest of Da Nang; the district committees, while not always in their districts and active, are still intact. One gets

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an impression that a sizeable VCI organization remains in and around Da Nang, and that the enemy has had a fair amount of success in developing "legal" cover in this area. In the latter half of 1970, several important VCI in Da Nang were neutralized, including a good portion of a district-level committee. According to VCI captives, the Communists immediately set out to reorganize that committee, even though they had to borrow cadres from other districts.

45. The Communists continue to hold sway over a significant proportion of Quang Nam's people. The GVN's province council estimated last October that little more than half the population could be counted on to support the GVN in a showdown. In mid-November, a former mayor of Da Nang estimated that a third of Quang Nam's militia force would fight the Communists willingly, another third would avoid commitment, and the final third would sympathize with the Communists.

46. Against this kind of challenge, the GVN does not appear to be blessed with a strong anti-VCI apparatus. American and Vietnamese officials alike bemoan the lack of training, experience, and motivation of the government's security forces. The Special Police are said to be relatively ineffective below the district level;

the anti-infrastructure program does not get adequate support from senior provincial officers and is hamstrung by politics. ARVN is said to meddle in civilian affairs in Quang Nam, and local political considerations (including bitter fights between various local Dai Viet^h, VNQDD, and other factions) are said to affect the deployment of territorial forces and selection of unit leaders. ✓

47. The departure of US Marine units from some of the more exposed sectors of Quang Nam has led to a decline in territorial force effectiveness. Several provincial officials report that these forces are less aggressive, that they have adopted a defensive attitude, and that their fighting power has diminished in areas where they once fought side-by-side with Americans. Security in the countryside has deteriorated markedly during the first part of 1971, even where province officials earlier insisted the Viet Cong could do little more than harass. The Communists are flexing their military muscles in districts west of Route 1 and south of Hoi An, the province capital. Just as territorial forces have cut back on patrols, some local civilian officials and security troops are leaving their posts and sleeping at night in Hoi An and Da Nang. This deterioration has been caused more

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by raw Communist military power than by the latent strength of the VCI. But military attacks give the local apparatus more room and a better environment in which to operate, and there is good reason to believe that Communist fortunes are improving in Quang Nam.

48. Officials in Quang Tin say the VCI has either been uprooted or suffocated from six to nine miles inland the length of the province, and that the number of old Viet Minh families has been reduced. Last September, however, the province chief said village committees remained in one third of Quang Tin's villages, the district committees still effectively controlled some of the village-level agencies, and the province committee was intact in the hills west of Tam Ky, the province capital. Early this year he said the effectiveness of district committees had been reduced further, and that less than 10 percent of the villages still had some form of a Communist organization present. Numbers aside, the GVN in Quang Tin has indeed set its sights westward into the piedmont where the VC have been strong for years, suggesting that the government is reasonably confident of its gains along the coast.

49. The territorial forces, under the leadership of an aggressive, imaginative and highly regarded province chief, have done their job well in Quang Tin.

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The Regional Forces have become the province mobile units and are mainly deployed in the foothills. The Popular Forces have become district mobile units leaving hamlet security solely to militia in much of the coastal region.

50. There has been a surge of Communist military activity by some of Quang Tin's native Viet Cong battalions in recent months. US Fire Support Base Mary Ann was devastated in March in an area that still seems out of reach of durable GVN control. During the same period, two companies from an enemy local provincial battalion crossed east of Route 1 for the first time in a year, but were turned back by GVN territorial defenders. The VC also were active in some of the GVN's priority pacification areas, but they did not prevent families from moving back and reclaiming some land.

51. Quang Tin has yet to be affected significantly by US troop withdrawals, although elements of the Americal Division based at Chu Lai have left the province from time-to-time for specific tasks. Like GVN officials in many areas, the province chief said flatly a few weeks ago that he will not be able to replace US assistance, particularly in the areas of helicopters, armor, engineers, artillery and medical support.

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52. Quang Ngai Province remains an enemy stronghold. Government gains are neither as extensive nor as durable as elsewhere in northern South Vietnam. The Viet Cong have been on the run in many places and even run out of some, but Communist influence among the people of Quang Ngai remains a very real problem. Security is fragile and does not extend very far west of Route 1 nor more than a few miles from district towns in the foothills. This is not to say that GVN gains are modest; on the contrary, they are substantial and hard won in a province where 50 to 80 percent of the families are said to have direct ties to the Viet Cong.

53. Communist sources reflect the kinds of problems the enemy has encountered in areas thick with allied troops and civilian infrastructure; VCI cadres were constantly on the move to avoid detection and capture; there were chronic food shortages; personnel replacements were hard to come by, even from sources that had served the VC well for many years; government land clearing operations erased base areas and places of concealment; some hamlet committees had no guerrillas; and a large population flight from VC-controlled areas removed a prime source of support.

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54. Through it all, the enemy apparatus had had to function as best it could. The province committee is in a long-time VC base area and all of the district committees remain intact, although they are on the move a good deal of the time. Traffic in foodstuffs from the coast to main force units in the highlands, and in munitions from base areas in the hills to local force and guerrilla units in the lowlands has been maintained. An effort was undertaken to lace Quang Ngai city with "legal" cadre for procurement and as in-place assets for the long haul. The Viet Cong have also tried hard to subvert South Vietnamese forces and the government's administrative network. They clearly have enjoyed some successes in these endeavors, and their gains may be greater than anyone can determine at present.

55. The government's anti-VCI effort has been hampered by political squabbles, by ineptitude, and by fence-sitting and fear that has persisted after years of strong Communist influence in Quang Ngai. The province chief is uncertain of the allegiance of his territorial forces. The top military officer in Quang Ngai is concerned with VCI operations at the village level because he thinks some elected officials are aiding the Communists. The province chief has had trouble getting Saigon's clearance

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for district chiefs he considers incompetent. Village chiefs are reluctant to identify suspected Communists for the police because of enemy reprisals.

56. Most observers and statistical indicators agree that GVN progress slowed appreciably in Quang Ngai during the latter half of 1970, and that the security situation has grown worse this year. VC military activity has been on the rise and has exposed serious weaknesses in the fighting abilities of the territorial forces. American observers concluded recently that the success of this year's westward pacification push depends on whether the Communists choose to challenge it or not.

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Military Region 2: Chronic Troublespots

57. The strong position the Communists maintain in Military Region 2 rests on an entrenched apparatus, and on North Vietnamese military power that is brought to bear from time to time where the GVN is vulnerable. The region is very large, ethnically and geographically diverse, and not very susceptible to generalized conclusions. There are two distinct areas in MR-2: the sparsely populated western highlands inhabited largely by non-Vietnamese where main force warfare still plays a significant role in enemy tactics; and the heavily populated coastal areas where the Communists now rely mainly on guerrilla action, terror, subversion, and political action.

58. Although their apparatus has taken a beating in recent years, the Communists have had considerable success in holding their own in MR-2. Most of the population now lives in areas occupied by government troops and administered by Saigon-appointed officials, but fairly firm government control extends to barely half the rural population--less than in any other region. The Communists thrive on the ineptitude of many of the government forces arrayed against them. The territorial forces in MR-2, handicapped by built-in ethnic and geographic problems, are considered the worst in the country. This is one of

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the prime reasons why the Communists still are able to operate fairly well in much of MR-2--they simply are not under as much pressure as they often are elsewhere.

59. The Viet Cong apparatus clearly has been separated from the people in many areas, but the government's hold is often tenuous, the veneer of popular support for the GVN is thin, and there are many spots where the Communists still enjoy a good deal of active support from the people, or where they can at least keep people on the fence. Sharply increased terrorism and several strong Communist military drives have dealt setbacks to the GVN in MR-2 so far this year. So many hamlet and village officials are being singled out by Viet Cong assassins tht it is now difficult in parts of heavily populated Binh Dinh and Phu Yen provinces to find people willing to accept government appointments.

60. The Communists have tried to keep the western highlands of MR-2 under a strong main force threat in order to use the areas as a staging base for attacks against the populated territory along the coast as well as to keep allied forces tied down. This spring North Vietnamese regulars struck harder in Kontum and Pleiku provinces than they

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have for several years and the consequences of their campaign have been felt throughout MR-2. The South Vietnamese have been largely on their own in the highlands since US ground forces pulled out last year. This spring they had to commit half the region's ARVN battalions to Kontum Province alone. Both sides took heavy casualties and pacification in Kontum came to an abrupt halt. The diversion of ARVN units to Kontum also enabled local Communist operatives in other MR-2 provinces to roam more freely and to reassert themselves in areas formerly under nominal GVN control.

61. In Pleiku Province the Communists carried out a devastating attack on a district headquarters and some nearby resettlement villages this spring. The senior US advisor in Pleiku lamented afterward that "our agent nets are practically worthless; our national police seem to have no informants; the people choose to be neutral; and the ARVN...is not a match for the disciplined, motivated, and well-led NVA night operators." He concluded that pacification had received a severe blow and that the memory of the massive destruction and the freedom with which the Communists moved about would endure in the minds of the people. The province chief in Pleiku

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clearly was unnerved by the enemy attacks. He charged that ARVN troops have not been able to fill the gap left by American forces, that security has been eroded steadily in the past year, and that Communist cadre now are able to enter all hamlets not along main roads.

62. In the thinly populated plateau provinces of southern MR-2, the government's position is at least superficially better, mainly because Communist forces are not very large and not very active. A desultory guerrilla war goes on and Viet Cong cadre are at work behind the scenes even where there are numerous signs of progress and well being. Most of these provinces fall in the middle of countrywide security ratings. None of them are trend-setters, however, and the way they evolve in the future probably will be determined more by events elsewhere than by the native strengths and weaknesses of either side.

63. The main prize for both the Communists and the government in MR-2 is control of the people concentrated along the coast. The northernmost province, Binh Dinh, has a population of about one million, the second highest in the country. Another million or so live in the four coastal provinces to the south. The local Communist apparatus generally

gets weaker and less effective as one moves south, but pockets of hard-core Viet Cong strength can be found all along the coast.

64. Because of its central location, its large population, and its agricultural resources--and because Communist roots ~~there~~ run very deep in this former Viet Minh stronghold--Binh Dinh has been one of the most bitterly contested provinces in South Vietnam. In the past two years the Communists have had to cut back the size and scope of their military activities in Binh Dinh, but they have sustained a damaging campaign of subversion, terror, and guerrilla attacks. The government has made inroads into the countryside and more villages than ever before have a government presence of some kind. But in the spring of 1970 and again this year the enemy carried out a seasonal campaign that caused setbacks and often made the Communists appear to have more vigor and resiliency than the larger government forces in the province.

65. The senior American advisor in Binh Dinh reported this spring that the Communists had a solid hold in one northern district, that they operated with impunity in a central district, and that both sides were fighting hard for another district not far from the province capital. He

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remarked on the ease with which the Communists are able to enter some hamlets and intimidate government sympathizers, and the fact that Viet Cong cadre were being turned up in very sensitive spots. One Viet Cong cadre targeted and killed in a police operation was identified by local people as their former village chief who had lived under "legal" cover and exercised authority on behalf of the GVN. Eliminations of Viet Cong cadre in this manner are all too rare in Binh Dinh, according to the US advisor; he reports the anti-infrastructure program is received with apathy at every level in the province.

66. The Communist apparatus in Phu Yen Province is less formidable than that in Binh Dinh, but it too supports a bloody campaign of terrorism and guerrilla warfare. Observing Communist tenacity in the face of overwhelming odds, the senior US advisor in Phu Yen noted in March that the Viet Cong leadership there must be composed of "some of the most thoroughly inspired officers ever to have engaged in warfare." The Viet Cong in Phu Yen have achieved notoriety during the past year or so because of their peculiar brand of "people-to-people" activities based on wholesale abductions of civilians. Last year the Communists formed regular troops into five-man squads that worked closely with political cadre

in this effort. The squads enter a hamlet or village, round up people, and take them to a remote place for a period of days or weeks of indoctrination.

67. The impact of this kind of action is hard to measure, but there are clear signs that it has made people in some places reluctant to side with the GVN. It serves as a reminder that the Communists can still reach them and that taking government positions or even cooperating with the government can be dangerous. Another vivid example of the Viet Cong wielding covert, but effective control over some people in Phu Yen came to light during recent local elections. Half the population of one village turned in blank ballots, reportedly in response to Viet Cong instructions.

68. There is less overt Communist activity in the southern coastal provinces of MR-2, but the Viet Cong still enter hamlets regularly in some areas and the enemy is not kept constantly on the run by government security forces. In Binh Thuan, the senior US advisor believes the government has reached the "take off" stage in the process of separating the people from the Viet Cong. Thanks in large part to a first-rate province chief who has made his leadership felt at all levels during the past year, the Communists are being denied

access to more and more human resources and the government is becoming more effective and responsive. The local effort against the Viet Cong infrastructure is no brighter than elsewhere, but the hope in Binh Thuan is to remedy some of the shortcomings on which the Communists thrive. A US advisor reports, for example, that a committee of citizens recently set up to investigate corruption in Binh Thuan may be able to "neutralize" more Viet Cong this year than the entire anti-infrastructure program.

69. Ninh Thuan is considered one of the most pacified provinces in MR-2. The healthy security situation has produced more confidence in the government, less support for the Viet Cong, and the gradual development of responsive political institutions. But Ninh Thuan still has its share of the enemy; the province chief estimated late last year that nearly half of his hamlets still had some form of party organization in place.

Military Region 3: Significant Pockets of Residual Strength

70. MR-3 has been considered a showcase of pacification, even though the Communists retain a good deal more residual strength than most of the statistics suggest. The government has relatively firm control over about two-thirds of the population. No hamlets are considered to be under the physical control of the Viet Cong. The ratio of allied to enemy forces in MR-3 is the highest in the country. There are still around 90,000 US military personnel in the region, including artillery, helicopter, and other combat and combat support elements, but most American ground forces have now left. Government territorial forces have taken over much of the security burden, especially since about half of the South Vietnamese regulars normally operating in MR-3 have been in Cambodia.

71. Although there are still areas of significant Communist strength, the Viet Cong apparatus in much of MR-3 has been weakened. The improved government position is attributable in large part to the absence of most of the Communist main force units that once made this area the scene of persistent heavy fighting. The four Communist divisions that formerly fought in MR-3 have not been deep into the region since the spring of 1969.

Some of their regiments deployed to the delta in the second half of 1969, while the rest stayed in sanctuary in Cambodia until Sihanouk was upset. Since then, these units have fought mainly in Cambodia. With them gone, allied forces have kept a fairly tight lid on Communist military activity in MR-3 and the Viet Cong apparatus has had to fend for itself.

72. In large parts of MR-3 Communist committees are kept on the run and well away from the populace. Yet in some of the most important and heavily populated provinces, including those closest to Saigon, the enemy organization not only survives, but still seems to draw substantial local support and to present a significant threat to local authorities. Moreover, the Communists are putting a great deal of energy into attempts to "legalize" their apparatus in order to operate in territory under government control; neither the magnitude nor the success of these efforts is measurable.

73. Thus, while the Viet Cong are in no position to upset the balance in MR-3 on their own, and the statistical trends are likely to continue showing them losing ground, they are by no means out of the picture. If the Communists were able

to bring back some of their military units now tied up in Cambodia in order to resume a heavier level of fighting, their local apparatus in MR-3 might be able to rebound and it probably could do at least some of the support tasks it is meant to do.

74. Strong government security forces and effective police work have taken a heavy toll of Viet Cong agents in and around Saigon itself. Covert networks are still being rolled up from time to time and the enemy's party apparatus has been crippled or destroyed in around two-thirds of the capital. But the Communists are still trying to rebuild, to infiltrate urban based groups, and to keep open liaison channels into the city. Their capabilities for terrorism and sabotage clearly have been reduced in the capital area, but we are much less confident that real inroads have been made into their political and subversive networks.

75. There is so little Viet Cong activity ✓ reported from some provinces in MR-3 that it is almost impossible to get an impression of the state of the local Communist apparatus. GVN officials in these areas are almost uniformly confident and cite the lack of overt activity as evidence of a sharp decline in enemy capabilities.

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76. Binh Long and Phuoc Long provinces on the Cambodian border of northern MR-3 fall into this category. Neither province is heavily populated and because enemy military units that once kept these provinces under pressure are now in Cambodia, local Communists operatives have an unhealthy environment in which to work. Roads are open, lumbering and other economic activities are on the upswing, and most people live under the government security blanket or they are leaving territory formerly controlled by the Viet Cong. In both Binh Long and Phuoc Long, Communist village committees are forced to live in the jungles. Communist tax collectors make their rounds but the lack of strong grass roots support for the Viet Cong suggests they are not very effective. Captured enemy documents confirm that the Communists have lost touch with many of the people in these two provinces.

77. In neighboring Tay Ninh province, the government mood is decidedly upbeat since the turnabout in Cambodia last year and the easing of the threat long posed by strong Communist main forces on the border. The local Viet Cong apparatus still enjoys a good deal of local support, but now the great bulk of the population is under some

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form of government control and government security forces are keeping the Viet Cong on the run. Many observers point out, however, that Tay Ninh is one of the areas where local accommodations and live-and-let-live attitudes toward the Communists are widespread. The return of Communist military units from Cambodia probably would enable the Viet Cong apparatus in Tay Ninh to become much more effective than it appears to be today.

78. Over on the coast in Binh Tuy and Phuoc Tuy provinces, the roots of Communist influence also run deep, and the Viet Cong apparatus still is quite strong. Communist village committees are not in place and overt Communist activity generally remains quite low, but there were 97 abductions in Binh Tuy in March and a sharp increase in Communist attacks in one district. The province chief in Binh Tuy acknowledges that as many as half the families in the northern part of the province have relatives in the Viet Cong; the chief in Phuoc Tuy estimates that a fifth of the population still support~~s~~ the Communists.

79. Long Khanh province falls in the middle rankings in terms of security in South Vietnam. The Viet Cong are not credited with "controlling" any area, but they remain strong and fairly effec-

tive. The province chief estimates that some 900 families provide support to the Viet Cong; all three districts have active committees and enemy personnel are in most villages collecting taxes and conducting subversive operations. Enemy documents from one district claim considerable success in recruiting South Vietnamese soldiers and getting them to desert. A recent press item claimed this same district is one of the few in MR-3 where Americans and Vietnamese agree that security has deteriorated since US forces pulled out in April. Communist attacks and terrorism are up sharply since then, suggesting that the Viet Cong have more freedom to operate.

80. Some of the toughest and most resilient Communist organizations in MR-3 still work in the three provinces that ring Saigon on the north, west, and south (Binh Duong, Hau Nghia, and Long An). Binh Duong has come a long way in reducing the effectiveness of the VCI, but the Communists still have regular access to about a third of the people in the province. In the northern districts some Communist village committees remain in place and both documents and police testimony indicate the Communists run a fairly successful subversive effort. Terrorism and abductions are quite common.

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In recent months the GVN has uncovered more than 30 penetrations of its own organizations, including two hamlet chiefs and three village chiefs.

81. Hau Nghia province is a long-time enemy stronghold and has the toughest entrenched Communist apparatus in MR-3. It also has the poorest security in the region and one of the worst security ratings in the country. Local government forces are woefully inadequate and have not been able to take up the slack since US forces withdrew last year. GVN officials estimate that about half the people have relatives working for the Communists, and the Viet Cong have access to over half the population. US advisors report that they tax, propagandize, and proselyte regularly. Terrorism in Hau Nghia is usually much higher than elsewhere in the country. There were 29 assassinations in January; in February the victims included three hamlet chiefs. ✓

82. Hau Nghia provides a good example of the inadequacy of VCI statistics. VCI strength is reported at less than 1,000--almost certainly an understatement in view of the levels of enemy activity and the pervasiveness of Communist activity. The Communists probably have been quite successful in establishing themselves in "legal"

positions. Some sources say that village councils are loaded with Communists and their agents; at least two penetrations were discovered in the provincial administration last year.

83. Long An province also is a traditional center of Communist strength. The enemy apparatus in Long An has suffered setbacks repeatedly, but it still shows the kind of resiliency that has enabled the Communists to flourish there for years. Overt Communist activity in the form of military attacks and terrorism is not very high, but the Communists have ready access to the people in the two most populous districts and they can collect taxes, recruit, and conduct subversive operations. Long An now ranks in the top half of the countryside security ratings and VCI strength is said to be below 1,000. But as in Hau Nghia, most observers believe the VCI remains stronger and more effective than suggested by pacification statistics.

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Military Region 4: VC Still Under Heavy Pressure

84. The Communists are maintaining their apparatus in MR-4, but its effectiveness has been reduced by the myriads of government forces running operations against them. The massive structure built by the allies, including three regular army divisions, territorial forces totaling some 200,000 men, plus numerous village militia, police, and other security forces, has simply stifled many kinds of enemy activities.

85. The enemy apparatus in the delta suffered a shock when Sihanouk was overthrown and South Vietnamese units subsequently drove into Communist base areas along the Cambodian border. Some government forces took heart from this development and began to fight like they meant it; a few more enemy personnel, most of them admittedly marginal, got fed up and defected. The impact of Cambodian developments on the enemy force structure and supply situation in the delta is still substantial. Some main force units are now fighting in Cambodia, many cadre have been sent there, and reflections of weapons and ammunition shortages are quite common.

86. During the past year ARVN divisions have moved into the major remaining VC strongholds

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simultaneously. They built operations bases in the northern districts of Kien Hoa Province, and the government now has at least some kind of presence in what had been strictly Communist territory. An ARVN Division has built fire-support bases in the U Minh Forest for the first time and brought the ground war to the former enemy sanctuary there. ARVN units also have occupied some of the slopes of the enemy's Seven Mountains base area, and driven into another long-time base area in the heart of the delta.

87. The Communists readily acknowledge in their own councils that the massive government presence is restricting their access to the people. They do not so readily acknowledge that they have alienated many of the people whose support they need. This happened on a massive scale during the Tet Offensive of 1968, when many homes were destroyed and people killed in areas previously relatively untouched by the war. Since then, the Communists have lost much of their appeal, and they do not command the fear, respect, and support they once had. In many provinces the atmosphere has changed, with people appearing more relaxed and enjoying some prosperity as government security controls have improved. There is a clear, if un-

spoken, assumption in many places that it is safer and better to live where the government is relatively strong and the Viet Cong is relatively weak.

88. Yet in some areas the people are still sympathetic to the Communists and do their bidding. Moreover, the Communist apparatus in the delta still functions even though district and village committees are often kept on the run and have more difficulties staying in touch with the people in the hamlets. The toll of enemy personnel at the grass roots level has been very heavy, but the Communists retain a great deal of resiliency and show time after time that they can come back if the government fails to keep the pressure on.

89. In five provinces in the northern part of MR-4, An Giang, Sa Dec, Kien Phong, Kien Tuong, and Go Cong, the Communists are now relatively weak. These provinces regularly are rated among the most secure in the country, and none of them has a very large Viet Cong cadre structure. In some cases good security can be attributed to aggressive government forces running a fair percentage of their operations at night--always a good sign--while in others local VC forces are simply weak and lethargic. In many places Communist village committees have been forced to take refuge.

90. The greatest concentration of grass-roots Communist strength in the delta lies in four provinces along the main channels of the Mekong River that flow down to Viet Cong territory in the forests on the coast. Both sides are strong and vigorous in Dinh Tuong province, the northernmost of these provinces. The Communist apparatus is large, Viet Cong main and local forces are aggressively led, and they periodically mount strong attacks. But the government side clearly is stronger. Elements from two ARVN divisions and relatively vigorous territorial forces are gradually wearing many of the VC down, including parts of the hard-core party apparatus. Many village committees are trying to operate in absentia, and recruiting in Dinh Tuong is not good enough to provide all the needed replacements.

91. In neighboring Kien Hoa province, the Viet Cong probably are still stronger than anywhere else in the delta. The VC apparatus there numbers more than 4,500 and the province consistently ranks among the worst in all of South Vietnam. The Communists still enjoy considerable support from the people and are well organized in the villages along the rivers and in stretches of mangrove forest along the coast.

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92. The government sent two regiments into Kien Hoa late last summer and kept the pressure on until the last few months. The Communists lost a district seat they had controlled unchallenged for the last eight years. Many Communist sympathizers felt the heat and came over to the government, at least for appearances sake. These defections have dropped off recently, however, as the government has relaxed its pressure and the Communists have waged an offensive of their own. They overran 11 outposts during the first four months of the year. The government regiments are gone, but the territorial security forces are still building outposts, and the general trend is likely to continue to go against the VC--but very slowly.

93. In Vinh Binh province the VC apparatus is believed to be only about one-third the size of Kien Hoa's but the Communists enjoy widespread support from the population, and they are fighting government forces which are better at promises and plans than performance. The weaknesses of the province security forces have made Vinh Binh among the six or seven worst security risks in the country. This may, in fact, understate the seriousness of the situation there. Considering the skill of the VC in Vinh Binh, the poor security forces defending

it, and the sympathy the VC still apparently enjoy among the people there, Vinh Binh province may well be the worst soft spot in the whole delta.

94. The Communists are said to have a large support apparatus up river in Vinh Long Province (nearly 3,000), but they are up against tough government forces. Even though security in Vinh Long is still rated very low, Communist forces are more likely than before to hide in their base areas most of the time and they do not have the close contacts they once had with the populace.

95. The three provinces situated around the periphery of the enemy base area in the U Minh Forest (Chong Thien, Kien Giang, and An Xuyen) have some of the worst security ratings in the country. Communist operations mounted directly out of the forest and along communications and supply routes account for some of the problems. But enemy strength is more durable because of the lackluster performance of the government's territorial security forces in these three provinces. In familiar cyclical fashion, enemy strength in the U Minh helps keep local government forces discouraged and on the defensive; this makes it difficult for the government side to recruit or otherwise enlist the aid of the local population; and this in turn preserves

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a favorable environment for enemy operations.

96. Chuong Thien province is rated the least secure province in the delta and the second worst in the country. The VC apparatus is numbered at only around 1,500 but it has support from many of the local villages. Seven GVN outposts were overrun during the first four months of 1971 in the eastern part of the province. Recently, territorial forces have put some additional pressures on the Viet Cong and ARVN operations in the U Minh are helping improve security. Chong Thien probably would still go Communist, however, if given the choice. The roads remain insecure and it is difficult for government forces to get around. Local government security forces are an indifferent lot, and the VC village committees still carry a lot of weight.

97. In An Xuyen Province, the local Viet Cong still seem to have an advantage over the government security system. Two Communist regiments that sometimes sally out of the U Minh into the populated areas is one reason for this. More important, however, are the large number of villages where sympathy for the Communists has been strong for two decades. These still supply the manpower needed by the enemy's local support and administrative struc-

ture.

98. Forces are fairly strong on both sides in Kien Giang Province. The Communists maintain a base area in the north and they control long stretches of the canal passing down through the province toward the U Minh Forest. The government has been putting on pressure, however, and provincial security forces are building outposts along the canal. Some of the villagers have begun to respond, markets are springing up near these outposts, and the Communists are reportedly having trouble collecting taxes. These improvements are still very tenuous. A recent campaign involving simultaneous operations by all government security forces in the province came off very poorly. Moreover, desertions from government ranks remain particularly high in Kien Giang.

99. Elsewhere in the delta there are pockets of Communist strength, but the provinces mentioned above are the main problem areas. Most of Chau Doc province in the western delta, for example, is quite secure now but the Communists have a base area in the Seven Mountains that enables them to keep a substantial military threat nearby. Communist village committees are still in place close to the Seven Mountains, thanks in part to the backstopping

provided by North Vietnamese regulars who come out of the mountains from time to time. Since late last summer ARVN units have been trying to dig the Communists out of their bunkers and caves, and enemy troops have been too busy to intimidate the province security forces as before. A number of nearby hamlets that had been abandoned to the Communists have been reoccupied, and more confident government security units seem to be getting a clear upper hand in most of the province.